

## New Initiative for Capacity Building in the Ministry of Agriculture

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Since 2002, numerous development agencies have become involved in the agricultural and natural resource management sectors of the Afghanistan economy through the Ministry of Agriculture. However, after 25 years of conflict, the Ministry lacked the capacity to develop appropriate policies, strategies and programs and was unable to attract direct donor funding. The Ministry was also unable to secure consistent access to highly qualified advisors who could facilitate policy formulation and strategic planning and to assist the technical departments in setting in motion national policies and programs. Despite the development of an overall agriculture and natural resource management strategic policy framework in late 2003, most Ministry personnel were not able to be responsive to the vision and direction being articulated for rebuilding the agricultural sector. There was also a lack of clarity regarding the appropriate role for the Ministry in responding to the needs of Afghan farmers as the country sought to rebuild the agriculture sector.



Minister Ramin greeting development partners of the Ministry of Agriculture

Since the Presidential Election of October 2004 and the establishment of a new Cabinet, the situation has improved. What was formerly known as the Department of Food has been moved into the Ministry of Agriculture forming the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Food (MAAHF). The newly appointed Minister of Agriculture, Obaidullah Ramin, brings with him a fresh focus on the private sector from his background as the Chairman of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and the Chairman of the Industries and Commerce organization. He quickly undertook a number of new initiatives to bring about positive change within the Ministry and has engaged in productive dialogues with donor agencies and development partners to outline his development vision and goals for the future of the agriculture sector.

In response to a request from His Excellency Minister Ramin, USAID, through its Rebuilding Agricultural Markets Program (RAMP) and by using an existing technical assistance mechanism with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), moved quickly to create an ***Institutional Capacity Building Program*** to facilitate his goals for the MAAHF. USAID is providing a cadre of senior advisors and technical specialists to work closely with the Minister to develop a Master Plan for the agriculture sector and to prepare a long-term development strategy. Furthermore, the team will assist the Ministry to enhance opportunities to rebuild the agriculture sector by addressing key policy, institutional and organizational constraints that impede market-led growth in agriculture and the sustainable use of natural resources. Other key donors such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the U.K.'s Department For International Development (DFID), the European Union, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and USDA have also responded to the Minister's request and with USAID, have formed an effective, collaborative team working with the MAAHF.

Restructuring the Ministry of Agriculture and accelerating agricultural sector growth is a huge challenge. Afghanistan cannot simply rebuild its agricultural economy but must construct a growth-oriented, private-sector led, market-driven agriculture sector capable of meeting food requirements, providing broad-based employment and income earning opportunities, while at the same time sustaining the natural resource base. Under Minister Ramin's leadership and with the support of the international donor community, Afghanistan should be able to develop a dynamic agricultural economy that capitalizes on the opportunities offered by the globalization of markets and new technology developments. With improved availability of modern technologies and rehabilitated rural infrastructure, Afghan farmers can meet food sufficiency requirements and start to produce more high-value crops. With enhanced business skills and linkages to markets, Afghan farmers, service providers, and businessmen can also meet the growing demand for high-value commodities and processed products, thus earning more income and galvanizing rural economic growth. This kind of growth should eventually replace much of the opium-poppy dominance of the rural economy.